

# No More Hats Thrown into the Olympic Rings: An Analysis of the Olympic Bidding Process

Megan M. Shoemaker  
Boston University, Department of Political Science

## Abstract

This research seeks to determine the necessary conditions for the United States to host another Olympic Games. To lay the foundation for my research, I historically trace the declining number of cities bidding for the Olympics. While exogenous factors such as political protests, terrorist acts, and boycotts contribute to a decline in the number of candidate cities from 1968 to 1984, modern disinterest in hosting the Olympics is motivated by endogenous dynamics derived from the bidding process. I argue the structure of the bidding process inherently favors special interests with the most to gain from hosting the Games at the expense of the city as a whole.

**Stemming from the central condition of public support, I deduce six underlying conditions that are pivotal for successful bids:**

- 1) The use of existing facilities and infrastructure
- 2) Absence of opposition groups
- 3) Private funding
- 4) ‘Insurance’ measures against cost overruns
- 5) Alignment of Olympic plans and urban development
- 6) Greater use of the host region

These conditions do not guarantee a successful Olympic bid, but are fundamental for the Olympic Games to return to the United States.

### Denver (1976)



Denver’s bid lacked several conditions for a U.S. city to successfully host the Games. **The presence of opposition groups, threat of cost overruns, and concerns over unrestrained development** resulted in Denver’s withdrawal of their bid. The overshadowing of public well-being by specialized interests deteriorated Denver’s Olympic dreams. As a result, Innsbruck, Austria hosted the 1976 Games.

### Los Angeles (1984)



The 1984 Games highlight key elements for the United States to have a successful Olympic bid.

**The use of existing infrastructure, private funding, and guarantees against cost overruns** contributed to the Game’s financial success. While the structure of the bid process inherently favors specialized interests at the expense of the mass public, the exceptional circumstances of Los Angeles’ 1984 bid protected the public’s interests.

### Boston (2024)



The bidding process for the 2024 Games is the first

to fully benefit from Olympic Agenda 2020. However, Boston’s bid lacked several conditions necessary for a successful Olympic bid. **The presence of strong opposition groups** weakened public support. Ultimately, **the threat of cost overruns** was the driving motivator in Boston’s recent withdrawal from the Olympic bidding process.

### Los Angeles (2024)



Replacing Boston as the US candidate city for the 2024 Games, LA meets all the conditions for a successful

**LOS ANGELES** Olympic bid. **The extensive use of existing infrastructure, absence of opposition groups, private funding, contingencies to protect against unknown costs, and expansive use of the L.A. county** makes Los Angeles a strong contender to host the 2024 Games.

## Motivation

### Historical Trends: Number of Candidate Cities from 1968 – 2024



## Methodology

The selection of case studies was designed to test the bid process’ impact on a city’s likelihood of hosting the Olympics. These case studies include: Denver’s withdrawn bid for the 1976 Winter Olympics, Los Angeles’ successful bid for the 1984 Games, Boston’s relinquished bid for the 2024 Olympics, and Los Angeles’ bid for the 2024 Olympics.

## Conclusion

The twenty-eight year dry-spell since the last Olympic Games hosted on US soil is reflective of inherent flaws in the bidding process. In an effort to rekindle interest in hosting the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee introduced Olympic Agenda 2020 to appeal to host cities and emphasize sustainability and legacy. The success of this new initiative will only be proven through time and the IOC’s commitment to real reform. Los Angeles’ bid for the 2024 Games largely aligns with objectives in Olympic Agenda 2020. If named host city of the 2024 Summer Games, Los Angeles could once more carry the Olympic torch to a revitalized era of Olympic prosperity.

